

Laura Purdie Salas – Online Writing Courses

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The Line Forms Here! Writing Poetry for Kids and Teens

An online workshop from February 11 – March 7, 2008

Participate in a four-times-per-week class for four weeks and get your poetry muscles in shape! Here's how it will work:

You will read a private blog post each class day that will contain a poem starter (for a poem you write right that minute), information (sometimes including links to online resources) about a specific poetic characteristic or technique, a sample poem, and a homework assignment. The homework assignment will be for a second poem or sometimes a revision of the poem you wrote at the beginning.

The emphasis here will be on producing material—good or not. We will talk about the basic aspects of poetry and we will focus on overcoming any blocks you have and just getting something down on paper, quickly. Then we'll play with those words to become more comfortable with our poems and improve them.

Each post will also include a very brief recommended children's or teen's poetry book. You don't have to read these during the class. It's just a way to build up a resource list of books to read. Since many bookstores have VERY small children's poetry sections, it can be hard to just browse and discover good books. (At the end of the class, I'll post a complete list of the recommended books plus other recommended resources.)

After you read the post and do the assignment, you'll post comments online. These can be responses, ideas, opinions, questions, and the actual poems you'll write. I'll respond, and I hope everyone will participate so that we have lively discussions.

Actually, I think this underplays the importance that you and your comments will have in this course. One of the best aspects to this class will be the community discussions. The group can talk about the process of writing poems, about poetry you've read that sets your heart racing or that leaves you cold, about how to achieve certain effects. I'll support the discussion with answers to questions, examples from my work and from other poets, suggestions for websites to check out, etc.

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The entire participation can be done in as little as 30 minutes per class day. You might discover online tools you like that you want to spend time with, or you might choose to spend longer on some assignments or participate in an in-depth discussion with your classmates. But if you can set aside 2 hours per week, you can complete the class and get lots out of it.

If you can set aside more time, you'll get even more deeply into writing poetry. The posts will appear four mornings per week, but you respond to them when it's convenient for you. So if you can take 4 hours per week for one month to read, write, and chat, even better!

I'll offer informal feedback and encouragement throughout the course. I will also more formally critique five poems for each person. These can be poems written for the class or other poems. These critiques may be done on the blog or through private email with me. If you post them on the blog, you may ask other class members for critiques, as well. Your choice.

After the four weeks are up, I'll leave the blog available for one more week and will continue to answer questions and participate in discussions.

At the end of this course, you will have written between 16 and 32 poems—or more! Some will be terrible, but some will be terrific! You'll be on your way to understanding the difference and also the necessity of writing the terrible poems as well as the terrific ones. You will have shared as many of your poems as you like with the group. You will have received critiques of five poems. You'll have an understanding of the basics of writing poetry and lots of good revision tips. You'll also have a ton of resources: great books to read, websites to visit, online tools to play with, etc. And you'll have met other people beginning their journey in writing poetry for kids. Maybe you'll even want to form a critique group.

I think it will be a terrific experience for all of us!

Tentative Syllabus:

This gives you an idea of the lessons we'll cover, but the order will change!

The Line Forms Here

1. Introductions
2. About alliteration and assonance
3. How is a tennis shoe like despair?
4. Weight of your words
5. Add a word, any word
6. Repeat 3 times. Repeat 3 times. Repeat 3 times.
7. Put on a mask
8. The line forms here
9. Pretty pictures
10. I beg your pardon
11. Does this make sense?
12. Speed it up; slow it down
13. Kind sir
14. Three guesses
15. Taking on titles
16. Copycat

Nuts & Bolts Info: The Line Forms Here: Writing Poetry for Kids and Teens

The class will be **limited to 20 people**.

The cost is \$225.

I will need 10 students minimum in order to hold the class. If fewer than 10 students register, all monies paid will be refunded to those who did register.

Important: When you register, please put this information in the comment section.

- * Your name (which might be different from the name on the Paypal account or credit card)
- * The email address you would like me to use to contact you
- * Where you heard about this class

Thanks!

You do not need to purchase any outside or additional materials for the class.

All class materials will be confidential. The materials I post are for your information and use, and you are free to print them out to save as a reference. They are not to be forwarded to other people or photocopied, emailed, or shared in any form with other people. Letters and writing samples posted by classmates are strictly confidential and you should not retain copies of anyone's work. Thanks for your cooperation. We need these assurances to make everyone feel comfortable sharing their work!

It may be that this is a more in-depth class design than you're looking for, but I wanted to offer a course that would really immerse you in practicing poetry.

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Instructor Bio

Laura Purdie Salas started out writing for grown-ups, but she soon discovered that kids were her favorite audience. After graduating from college with an English degree (emphasis in Creative Writing), she worked as a magazine editor, writing occasional freelance articles for newspapers and other magazines on health and education topics. She then taught 8th-grade English for two years and rediscovered her love for children's literature. Laura turned her focus to writing for kids and has never looked back. She writes realistic fiction, all kinds of poetry, and nonfiction books and articles. But poetry is her first love!

Laura is a member of the [Children's Literature Network](#) and the [Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators](#). She teaches writing for children (to adults) through the [Loft Literary Center](#) in Minneapolis and is a former instructor for the [Institute of Children's Literature](#).

Laura has [six poetry books](#) with Capstone Press. Four more Capstone poetry books will come out in the fall of 2008, and her picture book poetry collection with Clarion Books is due out in spring of 2009. Laura is also the author of [Write Your Own Poetry](#). In addition, she has written poems for various classroom materials. She has also written more than 35 nonfiction books for kids. Click [here](#) for a complete listing of her published and forthcoming books.

You can learn more about Laura at her [website](#). She also blogs about poetry frequently at [laurasalas: writing the world for kids](#).

Is This Class for You?

[This class is for you if you are a:](#)

Beginning Writer: Poetry is a whole different way of seeing things. If you're not a writer, but you're thinking you'd like to try poetry, that's perfectly fine.

Experienced Writer New to Poetry: Even if you have published fiction or nonfiction, if you haven't written much poetry, this is the class for you.

Beginning Poet Whose Poems All Sound Alike: If you've been writing poetry (good for you!) but your poems all sound similar, or you are only comfortable writing in rhyme, then this workshop will help you spread your .

Poet Who Doesn't Have Any Feedback: Maybe you've been writing quite a bit of poetry, but you don't have any way to share your poems and get feedback on them. This workshop will offer plenty of opportunities for that.

Poet Who Is Stuck in a Rut: I hesitated at first to open this workshop to both intermediate and beginning poets. Frankly, I consider myself an intermediate poet, and I thought, "Who am I to try to teach you something? Maybe you're already a better poet than me!" But after talking with a couple of talented poets who wanted to register for the class, I realized that this was ok. I'm good at gathering info and ideas and presenting them to you in a way that will spark new momentum in your work...no matter what stage you're starting at.

Teacher/Educator/Librarian Who Doesn't Like Poetry: If you must teach poetry-writing to kids, but you don't feel comfortable with that, this course can help. You will probably approach poetry-writing with the same anxiety your students do! You'll become more comfortable and enthusiastic through this workshop.

Teacher/Educator/Librarian Who Needs Fresh Ideas: Over the course of the class, you'll learn lots of great activities and tools to use with your students.

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This class **is not** for you if you are a:

Kid: This class is for adults who want to write for kids or teens. Sorry!

Advanced Poet: If you've published many poems or studied poetry extensively, you probably won't get enough out of this course to make it worth your while. Email me if you're not sure. Thanks!

Rhyme-Only Poet: I love rhymes, and so do kids! But writing excellent rhyming poems is an advanced skill. Here, you'll learn new skills to take to your rhyming poetry practice. But most of the exercises we'll do won't lend themselves to writing in rhyme. (I'll probably offer a rhyming poetry course later in the year.)

Sample Lesson: The Line Forms Here!

Poem Starter: Write a short poem about the last time you felt sad. This could be a big event or a minor daily happening. How many letters does your full first name have? That’s how many lines your poem will have.

Keep in mind our basic rough draft rules:

Write whatever comes into your head

Ignore that voice telling you it’s not a poem

See the events of the poem happening in your mind

Go!

Today’s Technique: An important decision to make each time you write a poem is where to end each line. That’s called the line break. Some poets end their lines where they want the reader to pause briefly. Others break their lines at the end of a phrase.

Poets commonly consider the weight of their lines. Each line in a poem holds about the same “weight” as each other line. So a really important word might have its very own line. Another line might have many more, less important words.

Look at this poem by Dorothy Aldis.

When I Was Lost

Underneath my belt

My stomach was a stone.

Sinking was the way I felt.

And hollow.

And alone.

---Dorothy Aldis (all rights reserved)

What is the effect of her breaking what would normally be the last line into two separate lines? Do you feel the extra weight that line break gives to those words “hollow” and “alone”?

Read this Lilian Moore poem from her collection, *Sam's Place*. This is the poem in paragraph form. How would you break it into lines?

Letter to a Friend

Come soon. Everything is lusting for light, thrusting up up splitting the earth, opening flaring fading, seed into shoot bud into flower, nothing beyond its hour.

Here's how she broke it into lines.

Letter to a Friend

Come soon.

Everything is lusting
for light,
thrusting
up
up
splitting the earth,
opening flaring fading,
seed
into shoot
bud
into flower,
nothing
beyond its hour.

---Lillian Moore (all rights reserved)

There's no right or wrong way here, but it's interesting to take poems you like and write them out paragraph style and then rebreak them your own way!

You can also use this fun [online tool](#) to learn more about line breaks.

Homework:

Rewrite your earlier poem in paragraph form. Now try it with three different versions of line breaks. Ask yourself, "Which do I like best?" Why?

Poetry Book of the Day:

This Is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness, by Joyce Kilmer
(Houghton Mifflin, 2007): This brilliant picture book poetry collection is by turns funny and touching, as a diverse classroom of kids writes apology poems inspired by William Carlos Williams' poem, "This Is Just to Say." The kids then receive poems in response from their recipients (or sometimes from other kids who step up to the plate). Target audience: 3rd-6th grade.